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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 004477

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [XF](#) [IZ](#) [ICRC](#)

SUBJECT: ICRC BAGHDAD TO PUSH A "CONFIDENCE-BUILDING"

AGENDA AT ITS MID-TERM REVIEW

REF: BAGHDAD 2068

Classified By: Acting DCM Christopher Henzel for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) On the margins of the UNRWA Major Donors and Host Nations conference (septel), PRM PDAS Greene met with ICRC Head of Delegation (HOD) Chistoph Beney to express USG concerns that ICRC actions in Baghdad were causing a deterioration in the overall USG-ICRC relationship. Greene asked that Beney implement a series of discrete steps to start restoring USG confidence in ICRC's detention monitoring activities in Baghdad. In the process of departing Amman to participate in ICRC's ongoing mid-term review of its worldwide operations, Beney told Greene that he intends to propose that ICRC's Mid-East Zone reviewers adopt the confidence-building measures outlined below. Beney admitted that ICRC's institutional tendency to "view tensions in detention work to be normal," combined with his mission's on-the-ground absence from Iraq, had "de-sensitized" him to the rift growing between his mission and Coalition Forces (ref A). Beney assured Greene that the aftermath of the Camp Bucca visit had "enlightened" him to the extent relations in the field are strained, and expressed a desire to lay groundwork ahead of his scheduled July departure to "turn the situation around."

ASHRAF PLAN: ICRC REQUESTS MEK DEFECTOR LIST

2. (C) Raising the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) as a possible vehicle to improve cooperation, Beney said he would use the ongoing ICRC mid-term review to press ICRC to clarify its objectives for the Ashraf Camp population "over the next six months," starting with a developing a concrete plan to facilitate the return of the 400-plus MEK "defectors" who are interested in returning to Iran as soon as possible. Beney noted that ICRC Baghdad is ready to start cross-checking the Ashraf residents who want to repatriate against its 1992 POW list, but requires formal notification to start the process. Beney added that ICRC Baghdad had approached MNF-I for the Ashraf returnee list earlier this month. (NOTE: Beney assured Greene that ICRC does not believe POWs have any fears that would prevent their return to Iran. END NOTE.) Beney predicted that ICRC would propose facilitating repatriation through a border operation, similiar to the symbolic repatriation carried out earlier this year. However, if the numbers prepared to return turned out to be small, Beney thought ICRC would consider using its aircraft to facilitate returns directly from airports inside Iraq.

3. (C) Beney expressed hope that progress on the MEK defectors would create sufficient momentum to enable ICRC to make a commitment to conduct private interviews for the remaining 3,000 Ashraf residents over the next six months. He also proposed that ICRC help raise interest in repatriation to Iran by improving telephone access for those who have already returned. However, he stressed that ICRC Geneva is struggling to see the value of interviewing the remaining 3,000 Camp Ashraf population who "remain under MEK control," and is concerned that the USG expects ICRC to "work miracles" by identifying a new population who want to return to Iran or finding a third-country destination for resettlement.

ACKNOWLEDGE IMPROVEMENTS IN DETENTION CONDITIONS

4. (C) Turning to ICRC inspections of MNF-I detention facilities, Beney acknowledged that inmate conditions have improved over the past year and that "ICRC should have been more appreciative of the improvements, and should have recognized the efforts that have been made." But he expressed concern about persistent reports that suggest ICRC Baghdad is "fixated on the provision of toothbrushes," when ICRC has communicated its serious outstanding concerns regarding undisclosed transfers to visiting USG delegations. Beney thought that ICRC could improve the lines of communication by working to meet MNF-I in Baghdad on a monthly basis, adding that he would visit Baghdad with his yet-to-be-named successor in July to kick-start the process. On ICRC Baghdad's efforts to engage MNF-I on its IHL concerns, Beney acknowledged that their efforts were "mis-timed," and stressed that ICRC has no interest in extending legal recognition to the insurgents. He also

assured Greene that ICRC Baghdad has "nothing to gain in talking to the press," and would work to ensure that any statements were coordinated with Washington through its Headquarters in Geneva in the future.

15. (C) PRM PDAS GREENE COMMENT: Beney clearly feels the heat of intense USG dissatisfaction with aspects of ICRC's performance in Iraq. Clearly, Beney also feels significant pressure from ICRC headquarters to improve the relationship with the USG. While responsive to USG criticism, Beney is transiting to another assignment and will not be a factor in moving the relationship forward. To get the relationship back on track, we will continue to strongly encourage a senior-level visit from ICRC Geneva to press ICRC to make tangible commitments regarding the Ashraf population, and urge it to focus on making tangible improvements to their press and communications strategy in Iraq. END COMMENT.

16. (U) This message was cleared by PRM PDAS Richard Greene.

HALE